

# SWAT Rocks

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Years ago, deputies had to approach dangerous situations without some of the sophisticated equipment that is available today. This caused deputies to be creative when they were conducting dangerous maneuvers.

In 1971, as Deputies assigned to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Special Enforcement Bureau were making a forced entry into a house, it was necessary to create a diversion so the suspect would not determine the location where deputies were entering. Sergeant Gerry Barnes, on the opposite side of the house from the entry team, picked up a handful of rocks, and as the entry team announced over the radio that they were making entry, Sergeant Barnes threw rocks through the windows. The noise from the entry team breaking down the door, along with windows breaking on the other side of the house, distracted the suspect such that he wasn't sure what was happening.



SWAT Rock

At the debriefing, the effectiveness of the distraction caused by rocks being thrown through windows was discussed. They decided that use of the rocks was very effective but some of the locations where SEB confronted suspects were in downtown areas or at homes that had landscaped yards with the rocks removed. During further discussion, deputies decided that instead of looking for rocks at the location they would make SWAT rocks a part of their equipment that they carried to a location. Canvas bags were found and filled with large rocks. These bags containing the SWAT rocks became part of their standard equipment. As time went on, other items such as baseballs and golf balls were added to the bag of SWAT rocks and were used to break out windows.

SWAT rocks were also used for other purposes. In some situations when there was no acknowledgement of a P.A. announcement by a suspect inside a location, SWAT rocks were deployed through a window. Usually after SWAT rocks were deployed, the suspect would move through the location to locate the cause of the window breaking. This allowed deputies on an outside containment to see movement by a suspect inside. Other times, it was important to know if a suspect was still inside or just to get a suspect's attention prior to deploying tear gas. In these instances, SWAT rocks were thrown through a glass window in order to get a reaction from the suspect. The deputy throwing the rock was covered by another deputy just in case the suspect decided to fire at them.



SEB Entry Team

SWAT rocks were still used on building entries even after the development of flash bangs.



Flash Bang Devices

Flash bangs are a non-lethal explosive device that is used to temporarily disorient a suspect's senses. It uses a dazzling light and thunderous sound to create a sensory overload that creates a physiological distraction. The device causes the suspect's mind to be overwhelmed by so much sensory data that he is unable to effectively react. This effect lasts six to eight seconds for most people.

Flash bangs are thrown just before the insertion of the entry team. They were first used in a tactical operation in July 1976 when Israeli commandos successfully employed them in Entebbe, Uganda to rescue Jews and the crew of a hijacked Air France plane.

Even after the addition of flash bangs to the SEB arsenal, SWAT Rocks were still used to break the other windows in a location prior to entry. As all the windows in the house broke at the same time, the noise and distraction caused the suspect to become disoriented.

SWAT rocks were eventually replaced with the less-lethal English ARWEN. This weapon fired large plastic bullets, shaped like a tadpole, that could be directed more accurately to break out windows. It was also less of a threat to a person inside the room where the window was broken. The aimed plastic projectile was less likely than a randomly thrown rock to cause injuries.



Arwen 37 Mk III Launcher

SWAT rocks are a great example of deputies becoming innovative when it became necessary to find a safer way to conduct their dangerous job. Given the technology available at the time, using simple items such rocks as a diversion was the only way to provide a safer approach for an entry team.

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